

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

JANUARY 30, 2012

Western Hills Middle School

400 Phenix Avenue

EXECUTIVE SESSION: 6:00 P.M.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY PUBLIC SESSION

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY PUBLIC BUDGET WORK SESSION

MINUTES

The Budget Work Session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School with the following members present: Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Traficante, Mrs. Ruggieri, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Bloom, Mrs. McFarland and Mrs. Culhane.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. It was moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the members convene to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws PL 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel, PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation; (Ahlquist vs. Cranston School Committee), (Contract Negotiations' Update – Custodians, Secretaries, Bus Driver Contract), (Consideration of legal options regarding status of aid to education appropriation and legal advice relating to same).

Call to Order – The Public Session was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was conducted and the roll was called. A quorum was present.

Executive Session Minutes Sealed – January 30, 2012. Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried.

Adjourn to Public Budget Work Session

Ms. Iannazzi asked if there was any objection to reverse the order of the Agenda so that the public can be heard first. There was no objection.

Pam Schiff

First I'd like to give a public shout-out to City-wide School Committee Member, Frank Lombardi, for his generous donation at the BASICS Concert for winning the raffle and giving all of the winnings back to BASICS. That was a big help and we really appreciate it.

Most of the items are for clarification on things that I don't understand and why they are the way they are. Why can't the schools be listed in alphabetical order? If possible that would be very simple. Also, when schools share an itinerant, would you put a code that lets you know which schools these people are attached to so you know where they belong and which part is part of them and where they're going.

There are certain elementary schools, Oak Lawn, Horton, Gladstone,

Arlington, Hope Highlands and Orchard Farms that don't have a part-time custodian listed. I'm wondering do they not have a part-time custodian. Is it a full timer who is getting overtime?

On Page 25, the Dutemple Resource Teacher Salary is \$185,407. I'm assuming that's more than one person lumped in there. How many people is that because the guidance is separate, the ELL is separate, etc.

Superintendent Nero

Did we not do an FTE Report? Mr. Balducci noted that we will and it will be presented in the final document. Mr. Votto noted that we resign fractional components for our FTE Staff service. It's just not one teacher. It could be for one or inclusion or an inclusion at grade level. It was reiterated that they would like a number next to the FTE Reports.

Mrs. Schiff

Page 48 – Boys' Cross Country Official for last school year was \$58. This year he's \$240 and next year he's \$298. Wouldn't an official be the same across the board for all the sports? It is a 24% increase in one year. The same thing with the Girls' Cross Country; they were actually -0- last year and now they're at \$240. Mr. Votto answered that the official's fees as negotiated with the Interscholastic League and from what he understands from Mr. Traficante, all official fees across the board for all kinds of sports, keep going up. Each group has a

contract.

Mr. Nero

Last year was the first year for UCOA and now are we better at pinpointing the account or is there any difference. Mr. Balducci noted that there is no difference in the wording of faculty/overhead. Mr. Lombardi added that many of the official groups have negotiated a freeze at least from two years ago last year.

Mrs. Schiff

Page 52 – A listing for an Athletic Driver P/S. They make \$44,947. That's a lot of money for a driver and I'm guessing it's not a full-time employee. I'm wondering what they drive and what does P/S stand for. Mr. Balducci answered that P/S stands for Purchases/Service which is to accommodate an outside vendor or a busing company because there are times that we have to go to a company like Grey Goose to transport the athletes.

Mrs. Schiff

Page 58 – Principal Directors Travel Auto – Who is this and where are they going?

Mr. Balducci answered that this is mileage for all our itinerant people who travel to different schools. There is also an account that is used for mileage for Principals' travel

Page 58 – Recreation OT Custodian – Why is that any different than

any other custodian? What does the Recreation do? There is no regular listing for Recreation.

Mr. Votto answered that this is for the City Recreation, i.e. Saturday Basketball, etc. We have to show this as an expense as to what this money is for.

Page 59 – Plant Environment OT Salary – Last year it was \$2712. and this year it is \$18,000. I didn't see a regular listing for this and what exactly is the Plant Environmental person? Mr. Balducci noted that this is Asbestos Removal which is done after school to deal with the asbestos tile removal. He noted that \$2,700 shows what we actually spent last year; however, on average it goes to \$18,000. Mr. Nero reported that most of our floors in all of the schools are all asbestos. There are years when they crack or are damaged where we have to go in and repair. If they're not damaged, they stay.

Page 59 – Separate listing for OT Custodian of \$38,306. What are they doing that the other custodians aren't doing for overtime that's already listed? Mr. Balducci answered that this is used to accommodate an existing custodian working a couple of hours for a night custodian. Mr. Nero noted that in the past when we lost the night person, what we've done instead is we extend the daytime custodian an hour or two to get as much cleaned as they can for the next day. Sometimes we're not in the position to replace the full time or part time night custodian. Mr. Nero stated that he and Mr. Balducci will speak to Mr. Zisseron tomorrow to make sure they are definitive

on that.

Page 59 – Pre-School Teacher’s Salary – It says \$194,916. What is the number of how many people that actually covers?

Page 60 – What is a utility custodian? Why are they separated out from all of the other custodians? Mr. Votto noted that this is the Utility Crew, which do moving of teachers from one building to another. They also cover buildings if they are short. They do outside work and minor repairs.

Page 63 – Literacy Conference Travel – They are the only ones getting travel, why are they still getting travel? Mr. Balducci noted that Literacy is funded by a State Grant but we have to show it on the budget.

Page 66 – School Nurses Salaries - \$70,466 – but every school has a nurse salary attached to it. Mr. Balducci noted that he will have to get back to her on this one.

Page 66 – Nursing Services contracted from \$60,000 - \$280,000. I think that Mr. Bloom had commented on this last week.

Page 67 – Mrs. Ruggieri will have to help me with this one because there is a word I can’t think of. Employee Assistance Program jumped \$11,000 but the City utilizes the same program. What was it

that you were trying to do with Councilman Pelletier. Mrs. Ruggieri answered, "Consolidation". Mrs. Schiff – this doesn't affect salaries. It doesn't affect unions; it's a perfect way to maybe try to save some monies. It is the exact same program that they used. If there's a chance that maybe because there's power in numbers that that is something that can be consolidated and not hurt anybody and have problems.

Ms. Iannazzi

The vendor for the Employee Assistance Program is that written into any of the contracts? Mr. Votto noted it is written into teacher contracts.

Page 67 – Central Registration ClearT – We've had no one in that position for five years. Is it something truly necessary? It was UCOA and probably charged to a different account number.

Page 68 – System Secretary Salary/Grant Secretaries and the Fiscal Secretaries. What are the numbers in those positions? How many people are getting those salaries? Mr. Balducci noted that the report will show this.

Jim Frost, 45 Grace St.

The main reason I'm here is to talk about re-instituting middle school sports. I have a few thoughts that I would like to share with you and also some concerns that I have. I have a daughter in ninth grade and she missed the two years of middle school sports. She was the first

class to go through that. My son's in seventh grade and he's going to miss it too. We realize that there are many obstacles in your budget and it is during tough times. The main concern I have is why is our fine school department not able to figure out this problem. Every other district in the State besides Cranston has figured this out.

Superintendent Nero

The original Caruolo Action in 2003; the judge ruled in that case that the BEP only requires high school sports so they removed middle school sports and then in 2004, the Mayor at the time came back and said he would give us \$800,000 that they underfunded us but we had to take middle schools sports back. The issue right now is that we are under Court Order that we cannot bring it back. You heard me say that we are now looking at programs that we thought would be extinct, we could bring back. We can not bring back some of these programs until the deficit reduction plan is fully completed which will not be for four years. That includes the middle school sports and also includes the fact that we cut the Talented and Gifted Program, Music at Elem. Schools. What the auditors looked at in that situation was that between CLCF and all the other opportunities, these kids do have opportunities. This was a court decision and I hate to use these words again, but I will. The court ruled that you could only have the "must haves" not the "nice to haves" and middle school sports were considered by the court as "nice to haves". We are bound by court action. Just for clarification, a lot of school districts did drop middle school sports; we're not in the minority any longer. Middle school

sports in terms of League Activities has been cut drastically throughout the State.

Mr. Frost

I've done some research on the BEP. It says that research shows that students are better able to learn when they are engaged in regular physical activity and receive adequate and proper nutrition. It says here, "each LEA should provide a variety of physical activity opportunities to students in grades 6 – 12, not just high school". Mr. Nero reported that, at the middle school level, we offer 55 minutes more in health and in phys. ed. than the BEP requires. They're not talking about extra curriculum activities; they're talking about in curriculum. The mandate is 100 minutes of PE and Health.

Mr. Frost

I'm a teacher in Lincoln; a phys. ed. teacher. It also says here, "Intramural athletics, interscholastic athletics and other activities in the BEP. Mr. Nero reiterated that this district went into court and we lost. As a result of it, we are following a deficit reduction plan. We lost. We wanted all of these programs. These people wanted all of these programs. We went to court and we testified in that regard and we lost.

Mr. Frost

I've researched the budget and it's amazing to me. Our proposed budget for the middle school for this year is \$15.5 million

approximately. In 2008, the last year you funded middle school sports, you're saving about \$100,000. That's less than ½ of 1% of the entire middle school budget. You're looking at 550 kids district wide that are losing an opportunity to play a sport. You're looking at maybe \$180 per student.

Ms. Iannazzi

Mr. Frost, we cannot add middle school sports until our debt is repaid. It's a court order.

Mr. Frost

Our kids are missing out on a lot. I've seenit's going to really destroy our athletic programs at the high school. When you are competing at the high school level against other schools that have those programs and you throw ninth graders in together for the first time in the 9th grade, they're two years behind. It's really going to hurt them. Yeah, you're under a court order but you're going to lose a lot of good kids in this City. They are going to decide to go elsewhere if they don't have those opportunities. It's unfortunate that a savings of less than ½ of 1% in a 120 million dollar budget ..you can't find it.

Mr. Lombardi

Mr. Frost, I appreciate everything you said and I don't think that there is one member of this school committee that would vote in a vacuum to eliminate middle school sports. I happen to be an interscholastic

league official. Sports are very important to me and I know it's important to a lot of my colleagues. The philosophy behind middle school sports, according to the auditors not according to us, is that middle school sports represents an extension of neighborhood sports, so that unlike high school sports, which are deemed to be an essential part of the BEP, middle school age children can obtain their ability to participate in sports at the neighborhood recreational level. It's not a "you're wrong", "we're right" thing. Not at all. We're compelled and everybody starting with three years ago stood at that podium and talked about that; talked about music; talked about epic; and we didn't like doing any of it. We were forced to do so sir.

Brian Hanley, 106 Massasoit Ave.

I learned a lot today; I didn't know about the court order that you are under for middle school sports. I appreciate that. I have four boys and will spend the next 7 years going through Park View. I'm just looking to see if the school committee is willing to use private raised funds from the PTO's until this court order is lifted; whatever gets us back down to using the budget to pay for this.

Mr. Lombardi

Mr. Traficante and I along with the Superintendent stood in a room in the library with every coach in the district and we discussed that. Two years ago we discussed that very issue about raising private dollars and the only thing that we required was that when you raise those private dollars we don't want to get into an East vs. West

situation. Throw it into a pot and let everybody reap the benefit of it. There was at least 60 people involved in athletics along with the central administration and Mr. Traficante and I. Everybody was excited and tooting the horns and ready to wave the flag to get going. We haven't received a dollar in that effort since then.

Mr. Hanley

I just experience...Title 9 is a big player here and we can't raise money for softball unless somebody picks it up. We can't do baseball; but what I want to do is at least look into boys and girls basketball, citywide for all three schools. What I would like to do is work with the School Committee and this Orchard Farms vs. Hope Highlands 6th grade game that they have; it's a break even game. They have their 6th graders play. I'd like to explore maybe we charge \$2 - \$5 for Rhodes School vs. whatever. That's where my kids are, and see if any other PTO's want to do the same. Enough money could be generated to possibly throw the money at basketball for operational costs.

The toughest thing I see is getting coaches to work with the students to get them ready for a March game. I'd just like to work with you guys on the Basketball aspect.

Mr. Nero

I've been in this business for a long time and I know that what they put into BASICS has been just incredible. It's so difficult to do when you're doing that type of thing; to do something that is going to be

sustainable for any period of time. We hear this all the time. You can't believe the fund raising that is already going on in the district. I've got my band director here that will tell you that they work the concessions at Gillette Stadium every single week to raise money. When this all came about, we had meetings with all of the coaches. I said that I would only agree to it if the money is there and up front. A lengthy discussion ensued. Mr. Nero reiterated that we will hopefully have a resolution pretty soon to bring some programs back after the deficit is paid but in fairness to everyone, we took away all middle schools sports; we would have to bring back a reasonable resemblance of what it was before. We've been down this road in the past. People have every good intention to do this but we have found that it doesn't have any sustainability. That's why it should be the responsibility of the School District to have these programs; it shouldn't be going out to fund raising.

Mr. Nero noted that our debt is paid off in 2015-2016 for the 2016-2017 school year.

Public Budget Work Session

Mrs. Culhane

I just have a proposal. In talking with the Band Director, Mark Colozzi, and a few other people we've been talking about the fact that we have cut so many programs; music being one that has been really cut into as well as sports. However, I know that the Superintendent

has been dedicated to maintaining so much of what we can of what we already have and one of those things that I'm looking to see is if we can put back at this point in time potential funding for the Band for travel. We cut that two years ago from the budget. It amounts to less than \$20,000. I think the last year we had it, it was about \$18,000 between the two schools. My rationale behind that is that we have a new set aside in sports from the Gate receipts and I think that it's fair to say, for a couple of you out there, that you're not at those games necessarily to see the fantastic East vs. West game but rather to see the Thunderbolts or the Falcon Band. I think in recognition of that fact that a portion of that money from those gate receipts is really not just necessarily for the athletes going to those games, but the parents of the band. I think that it would behoove us to try to support that program by providing transportation back so that these parents all aren't forced to do this on their own. We provide it for the band and I think that if we're going to say that we're going to invest in music in the high school and really maintain that program, I'd like to think that we could find a way to take some of that money and really use it for that purpose.

Mr. Nero

If you're going to do something like that I would suggest that you add a separate appropriation. Without the football team on a Saturday, the band has no where to play. I realize this and this is no disrespect

to Mark, but when it's a heavy rain day, sometimes they cancel the game; sometimes we don't let the band on the field but the football team does play. The football aspect of it...there is also all the other sports that we have...again, if we're going to do something, then what we do in the high school should be done right. That's why I put the band uniforms on. I ask you not to invade that money because it's not that Mike is going to have a huge revenue of funding, but he's put off things as well. We've cut a lot in sports; we've cut all the middle school sports; we've cut the freshmen sports..you might want to think about some kind of appropriation.

Mr. Lombardi

Mr. Balducci, can we look into that? It seems like this is a rather insignificant amount of money for a significant cause so I wouldafter speaking with Mike Traficante, I don't think that the sports program can afford to cut out \$20,000 out of its subsistence level now that it's going to fund itself. It may be that we can cut and paste in 4 or 5 different locations to try and get pretty close to that number. Nothing I am saying should be construed as a promise nor a contract.

This is merely an offer for Mr. Balducci to do some informational research for us.

Ms. Iannazzi

Not to get anyone's hopes up at this point; because while we're all eager and want to support the band, we have no idea what the Mayor is going to propose in terms of funding and if we have to go back and

cut \$1.6 million from this budget because we are level-funded there shouldn't be any promises out there to any parents as to what should be expected.

Mrs. Culhane expressed herself as Mr. Lombardi did that this is not a promise or contract. We know we have to go back to the drawing board potentially. I put that out there as an idea of maybe something we could look at because in talking to a lot of the band parents, I know how much that gesture, as small as it may seem, would mean.

Mrs. Ruggieri

I just wanted to make sure that I understood the athletic program revenue that has moved now. In prior years we always budgeted \$43,000. Are you looking at now saying that if we go above that \$43,000 that's where AD Traf has now that discretion or is that \$43,000 going into the Athletic Fund? One suggestion I might make is to say that we keep that \$43,000 as it's always been and anything above and beyond that could be shifted. I'm just making a clarification on what that number was going to be.

Mr. Balducci

To begin with, in the budget you're deliberating this evening, you are losing \$43,000 in the revenue side but you're picking up the loss of approximately \$60,000 on the expenditure side. It's coming out to a positive \$25,000 net gain to this budget. The proposal is to give the entire \$43,000 to the Athletic Program. He is going to be responsible

now for approximately \$65,000 possibly in expenditures based on the line-items he has chosen to take responsibility for. From this budget standpoint, it is a bottom line gain; it will put more responsibility on the Athletic Director and in those good years he will have additional funds that he has not had access to in prior years. Mr. Balducci reiterated this process.

Mr. Nero

There have been a number of School Committee people who serve their full terms who always thought that the Athletic money did not go into the general fund but went back to the athletics. We are now making it go back.

Mr. Traficante

I hate to be a kill joy but I've had conversations with the Mayor. We're going to get level-funded. We better start looking for \$1.6 million in cuts. Let's not talk about additional programs.

Mr. Nero

If we get level-funded it will be a crime. How much more can we do as a district to get our act in order. This will only put us further in debt. When you're looking at a budget that's 1.76% increase as the difference has been over the years; then what we're looking at is never having the ability to pay back our loan and never bringing back our programs here. After a while some crumbs should come our way.

This is not a good thing. I understand perfectly what the Mayor's

problems are in terms of the pensions on the City side but what more can we do as a district. Right now we've put ourselves in positions that we won't be East Providence, etc. We are in a fragile position right now; however, with the sacrifices we have all made, we will be in the same position every year.

Mrs. McFarland

In regards to the Public Consulting Group – what are we budgeting for this year? Do we have any increases in that particular area? Mr. Balducci noted that if you go to the document “Medicaid” - \$50,000 to accommodate their increased cost to the district. On the revenue side we have for this year and next year a line item budgeted.

Mrs. McFarland asked how the workload is for them and are we making any progress? Mr. Balducci answered that it is difficult but we seem to be almost caught up. Mrs. McFarland asked in regards to last year being provided with a summary of the Capital Budget. Do we know what...? It was noted to Mrs. McFarland that a Capital Budget Summary was presented to the committee tonight. Mrs. McFarland did not receive one so she was given one at this time. Mrs. McFarland asked about the request for Stadium School. Mr. Balducci answered that Stadium School has been requested for next year and explained in detail about this year. Our request is almost \$1.5 for 2012-2013. Mrs. McFarland asked if the City has bonded out for any Capital Improvements on the City side. A discussion ensued. Mrs. McFarland noted that when they meet with the City tomorrow, are we going to have some idea before our next budget session and if

so, could Mr. Balducci e-mail that to the committee to let them know exactly what they plan on their side as well as what they have budgeted in the past for themselves. We're making capital improvements and my concern has been that if we don't start to make some of the improvements, I know I'm on the school side and I've served on the City side as well, and my concern is that the longer we negate doing some of the work that we need, we can see what is happening on the City side for the infrastructure, I'm concerned about some of the schools' infrastructure particularly my comment at the last meeting was my concern about the wall at stadium. This has started to become a hazard or a danger to our children and to our general public.

Mrs. Culhane

Last year we had asked for \$675,000 for windows at Park View. Was that rejected? It was noted that both Park View windows and the Stadium repairs were rejected. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding this issue with Capital Improvements.

Mrs. Ruggieri

When there is a corresponding revenue item for an expense, is there a way that you could come up with a code for that; like a little star or something so that we know that if there's a line item out there that seems off the cuff and we know that there is corresponding revenue for that expense so we know that there's something that offsets an expense. Mr. Balducci noted that he would see what he can do.

Mrs. McFarland

Last year we requested \$92,500 and this year you're requesting \$85,000; do we have a different bid or a lower idea of the cost? Ms. Iannazzi noted that perhaps Mr. Zisseron could come to the next meeting and explain this to the committee.

Adjourn Work Session – A motion to adjourn the session was made by Mr. Traficante and seconded by Mrs. McFarland. All were in favor. This meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank S. Lombardi

School Committee Clerk